

*Field Naturalists
Club of Ballarat*
Incorporated

APRIL 1995

EXCURSION - NEWS SHEET

- Meeting **Apr 7 Dr J McLaughlin: Barn Owls**
- Meeting **May 5 Dr F Harrap: Humpback whales at Fraser Island**
- Excursion **Apr 9 Williamsons Creek: Lyndsay Fink**
- Excursion **May 7 Mt Mercer / Dereel: Pat Murphy**



President: Mr J Gregurke
Secretary: Mr L Fink
Treasurer: Mr G Binns
Editor: Mr A Dyson

PO Box 328W, Ballarat West 3350

MEETINGS are at the School of Mines & Industries, Art Building, Lydiard St. Sth., 7.30pm.

EXCURSIONS start at "Book City", cnr. Sturt and Armstrong Sts. 9.30 am (full day outings) or 1.30 pm (half day).

Field Reports - March meeting

Lyndsay Fink - Wedgetailed Eagle at Williamsons Creek demonstrated how to catch a rabbit. As the rabbit sat up, the eagle went behind a hill then came in low and dropped on to the rabbit.

Carol Hall - the Blue-billed ducklings at Lake Wendouree had vanished. She was told on a visit to Serendip that Eastern Swampheens preyed on the young ducks.

Helen Burgess - a Crested Grebe with a young one on its back on Lake Wendouree.

Ken Hammond - Yellow-plumed Honeyeater in his garden on February 19 and a Fuscous Honeyeater on February 28. During a waterfowl count on Lake Wendouree on March 1, he and Margaret Rotheram had counted 44 Crested Grebes including 19 young.

Pat Murphy - Creeping Monkey Flower (*Mimulus repens*) on the dry shore of Winter Swamp, which was drying out very quickly. This small prostrate pratia-like plant was quite rare in the district, only recorded in one or two places by C Beaglehole, and usually grew in shallow water. Another interesting record was Small Spike-weed (*Eleocharis pusilla*). (On the March 5 excursion, she also noted that the Creeping Monkey Flower was at Lake Wongan, where 75 Brolgas were seen).

Alan Morison - Black-fronted Dotterel, Pied Stilt, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and 3 Royal Spoonbills at Winter Swamp. He also reported that Lake Goldsmith was dry with a mirage at the western end.

Frank Harrap - White-lipped snake at Mount Helen. Wattlebirds were upset and a Hobby flew off.

Lyndsay Fink - Regent Honeyeater in the Brisbane Ranges.

Margaret Rotheram - Flock of 12 Brolgas feeding near the Regulator Channel at Lake Martin just south of Cressy on February 20.



DIARY DATES

Wednesday April 26: 7.30pm. Committee Meeting at Ken McDonnells house

CRAWFORD RIVER STATE PARK

On our way to Nelson recently we passed through Hamilton and headed for Hotspur along roads to the west of the Henty Highway. The road into the Crawford River State Park is reasonably well marked and gives on to the grandly named dirt road The Boulevard. The road led us down through eucalypt forest with lush undergrowth to the Crawford River. Picnic or camping spots are designated by bird names such as Kingfisher, Bronzewing etc and lay between the road and river we think that the river in this valley must be dammed back as it was wide and tranquil hosting black swan, chestnut teal and water margin birds.

The largest area of coral fern we have ever seen presented itself along the track. The fern proved to be Gleichenia dicarpa the pouched coral fern or tangle fern. On one side of the road there was a frontage of about fifty metres and the plants extended back as far as could be seen. On the otherside there was a patch about $\frac{1}{4}$ acre in extent. In some places the tassel rush was growing through the fern making an aesthetically pleasing textural contrast.

Adding to the scene were a number of brown butterflies with conspicuous orange markings on the forewings, probably female Sword Grass Browns.

The "Boulevard" continued across the Crawford River - only a trickle at the bridge - passing through farmland to meet the Princes Highway a few kilometres East of the Nelson via Drik Drik turnoff.

This diversion is recommended to anyone travelling that way.



March 1995

The Portland F.N.C. was host to about 150 people from a diversity of clubs. The organisation was very good, the catering excellent, and the only complaint we heard was related to insufficient time to enjoy all the programme. Indeed choosing our excursions was difficult. We opted for a full day excursion through the Lower Glenelg National Park in the company of Cliff Beauglehole. Points of particular note for us were the extensive growth of coast wattle (Acacia sophorae) and the Kangaroo Island pomaderris, (Pomaderris halmaturina), which is a local plant despite its common name. We were shown a natural hybrid between Acacia oxycedrus (Spike wattle) and A.sophorae. The scrambling coral fern (Gleichenia microphylla) was compared to G. dicarpa which we had seen elsewhere.

There was also an example of the lime fern (Pneumatopteris pennigera) which requires a soil with a high calcium content. Plants in flower were Silver Banksias, a small-flowered Wahlenbergia, the occasional geranium and blue daisy. In a ploughed firebreak a fine example of feather-heads (Ptilotus macrocephala) bloomed in solitary splendour. This species is declining in occurrence.

Good sightings were made of Gang-Gang cockatoos, purple swamp hens clambering through riverside trees, white faced herons, chestnut teal, little pied comorants, yellow robins, white-fronted tree creepers etc and best of all a ground thrush which fossicked around a picnic ground quite unperturbed by the lunch party.

That evening we listened to a talk on the frogs of the Portland district illustrated by many remarkable slides by Ivor Graney.

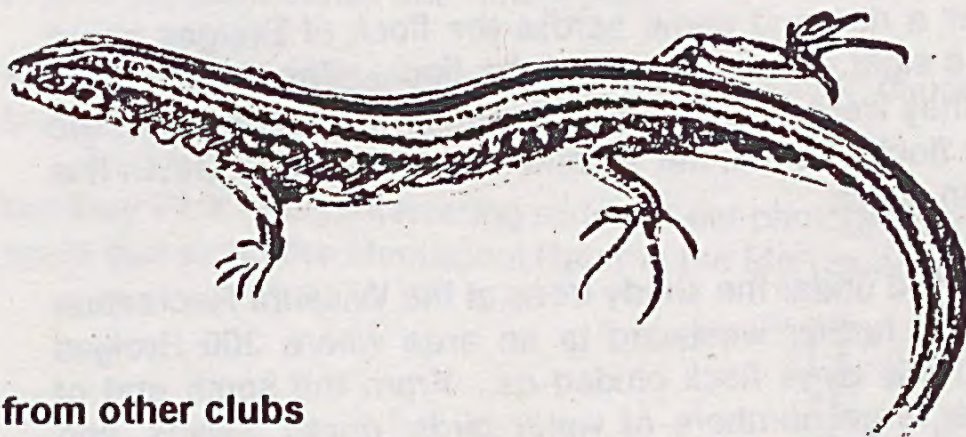
The following day we elected to join a rock-pool party led by Mrs R.Willington and family. Our appetites had been whetted by an illustrated talk on the first evening of the camp. We explored a limestone platform to the East of Port MacDonnell until driven off by South-Westerly squalls. Never the less the effort was rewarded. Tests (shells) of two species of sea-urchin were common amongst sea-weed.

Innumerable shelled creatures and sea anemones were seen. The previous day's excursion had also found a nudibranch and the test of a heart-urchin. This latter animal is frequently found as a fossil along the banks of the Murray and also along the Victorian coast eg. Airey's Inlet.

We left the beach and passed through Port MacDonnell to Cape Northumberland there to enjoy the ferocity of the waves, driven by the South-Westerly wind, crashing on to the rocks. Below the cliffs there huddled, between the rocks out of the sea's reach, five or six fairy penguins, two, at least were young birds. No doubt the vigorous sea had prevented these birds returning to feed at dawn. On the eastern face of the cape the eroded cliffs (limestone) had revealed fine examples of fossil roots and tree stumps.

That afternoon and evening were spent cruising the River Glenelg, visiting the Princess Margaret Rose Cave, consuming an excellent barbecue tea and then spotlighting on the return journey.
An excellent outing.

K.&D.McD



News from other clubs

Maryborough's rare tree - a cypress tree growing near the grandstand in Princes Park has been identified as the rare *Juniperus phoenicia*. This is a species not previously known in Victoria. The National Trust is registering it, tree surgery has been carried out and it is hoped that a 'significant tree' label will soon be attached.

Railway reserves - The Geelong FNC newsletter of February 1995 mentions the springtime surveys of particular sections of railway reserves of Pettavel, Winchelsea, Wingeel and Elaine taken by their plant group. This is the first stage of a Botanical Guardian's project which they are undertaking for the DCNR.

A wetlands excursion in autumn following a very dry year may seem a contradiction. Those expecting to see swamps full of water would be disappointed. As we journeyed west of Ballarat onto the volcanic plains, our leader, Gavin Cerini was able to show us many wetlands. Farmers are often restoring wetlands by blocking old drains; but others are still draining water from low parts of paddocks. We were soon able to identify the remnants of vegetation which indicated seasonal inundation.

Just west of Chepstowe we stopped alongside a paddock where the remains of a Brolga nest was still visible. This area is the closest to Ballarat that Brolgas are known to breed. The requirements of a wetland for Brolga nesting seem to be a minimum of 5 hectare, water 250mm deep. Fencing of wetlands is not necessary, in fact fences may be a hazard for young Brolgas. Removed cattle during the nesting period would eliminate the danger of nest trampling.

At Lake Wongan, north-east of Streatham, we met a local farmer feeding his sheep. He told us that there was a flock of Brolgas on the east side of the lake. On the drive around the edge of the lake we saw examples of what a conservation conscious farmer can do. The edge of the lake had been fenced and planted with indigenous species. This had also allowed the regeneration of remnant vegetation.

We drove over a rise and came across the flock of Brolgas about 100 metres away. The sight of cars disturbed the flock. The flock took to the air, trumpeting as they went, and flew a kilometre to the south end of the lake. This magnificent flock of birds, the second largest known to Gavin this season, was a delight to watch.

Lunch was enjoyed under the shady trees at the Willaura Recreation Grounds. We journeyed further westward to an area where 200 Brolgas were seen recently but this large flock eluded us. From the south end of Lake Muirhead we saw large numbers of water birds: ducks, swans, and spoonbills. Then we saw 4 brolgas land on the far side. Searching with telescopes and binoculars brought the total to 16 in groups around the lake.

As we approached a salt lake which was to be our last stop some Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos flew out from a pine tree shelter belt. One of these was carrying a pine cone. There were a large number of Chestnut-breasted Shelduck on the lake and also Welcome Swallows, Magpie, Magpie Lark, and Masked Lapwings.

A cup a tea was appreciated by all before making our way home. Thanks to Gavin Cerini who used his knowledge of the region and local contacts to lead us to an interesting range of wetlands. JG

Members Night

Following the AGM on March 3 several members showed video, photographs and slides:

Helen Burgess - showed slides of a trip taken to the north of Australia - Ayers Rock, and the Olgas.

Frank Harrap - a video with material taken during the past two years in the Wombat Forest. Several active birds, bush, streams and ferns.

Pat and Bill Murphy - slides taken at Winter Swamp from the initial dredging in 1981 to lush native grass growth in 1993.

Carol Hall - slides of a visit to the Carnarvon Gorge National Park in Queensland.

Val, Caroline and David Hocking - photographs of a trip they took to Heron Island near Rockhampton. Rock pools, Caroline with a long black starfish and David holding a sea cucumber.

John Gregurke - slides of coastal areas - wave cut platforms, caves, pinnacles, sand dunes and mangroves.

Ken Hammond - slides of a trip to 'Captain Cook' country at Whitby at the mouth of the River Esk in Yorkshire.

Lyndsay Fink - very interesting slides of old photographs taken over 100 years ago along the Moorabool River in the Morrisons area.



FLAME-ROBIN

The Greyheaded Fruit Bat. *Pteropus poliocephalus*.
 Order *Chiroptera* Sub Order *Megachiroptera*
 Family *Pteropodidae*

Although maligned by orchardists the Greyheaded Flying Fox does not usually eat cultivated fruit unless its natural food is scarce. It prefers fruits and blossoms of the natives. Feeding groups are usually 10 or so, except in trees with an abundance of food. More than 20 different calls are made for communication with each evoking a behavioural response. These calls are audible to us. Food is located by smell. As pregnancy advances the females become segregated from the males. The young, which has no underfur, is carried by the mother. The young fly at 8 to 10 weeks when they are fully furred. The furthest south breeding camp is Nowra in NSW. The range may extend southwards - individuals being found on Bass Strait Islands. The extension could be an effect of the felling of rainforests and the clearing of eucalypt forests which has reduced the food supply, leading to increased competition with the Black Flying Fox whose range has been similarly extended.

Greyheaded Flying Foxes would be found in the Ballarat area when blossom and nectar is plentiful. Their status is common in limited habitat and is now probably only as a visitor. There are no subspecies.

Elfin



Pteropus poliocephalus